



Strategic Communications, Business Development, Public Affairs

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RE: Registrant 5916

The following op-ed was recently submitted by The Tool Shed Group LLC (Registrant #5916) to the Huffington Post.

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When cooler heads don't prevail

The recent summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), a key international body, was quite an affair. Well attended by high-level officials from Europe to the U.S. and from East and West, it was nevertheless plagued by implacability and disagreements.

Some disagreements at the summit, overshadowed by the recent WikiLeaks scandal, were inevitable – especially given the peculiar timing of the leak, just on the gathering's eve. And those revelations did more than just offend world leaders, who came to Astana, Kazakhstan, after learning that United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton signed documents ordering the collection of their personal and sensitive information.

With regard to the South Caucasus, in particular, it is odd that commentators close to the Armenian government described the atmosphere at the summit as “positive” and “pro-Armenian.” These are both instructive and revealing characterizations because, in spite of the pre-summit hopes, there was no real progress made toward resolving the protracted Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. The summit itself – the first in 11 years – was plagued by significant disagreements among the major players, mostly, the U.S., Russia and the European nations.

In fact, Azerbaijan's Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov observed that the summit in Astana demonstrated the re-emergence of bipolar relations between East and West in Eurasia setting stage for long-term competition. Apparently for Armenia this is “positive” and “pro-Armenian.” Attempts to prolong an unsustainable status-quo of non-resolution in the explosive Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and Armenia's own continued regional isolation as a result of this cannot substitute for a strategic outlook that Armenia so desperately needs.

Hopefully, not all in Armenia share Yerevan's official and short-sighted policy of falling yet further into dependency on Russia and Iran and sabotaging the Karabakh negotiations. If those individuals exist, it is a good time for them to speak up for the integration of Armenia with its neighbors and ending the conflict, which continues to hurt both the Armenian and Azerbaijani people.

Of course, the WikiLeaks revelations helped nothing. The embassy cables showed the incompetence of American diplomats around the world, who came across as gossip mongers with poor to non-existent analytical skills rather than a superpower's envoys. Therefore, in Azerbaijan (We have yet to see cables from the US Embassy in Armenia.), the US embassy peddled factually incorrect rumors instead of promoting US interests and working to achieve peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is worth mentioning that the US, along with France and Russia, is a co-mediator at the talks between the two Caucasus nations.

This is embarrassing to say the least. Even more embarrassing is that at a time when the deficit of America's diplomatic talent is painfully evident, Senators Boxer and Menendez are blocking President Obama's nominee for ambassadorship to Azerbaijan because of domestic pressure from Armenian-American organizations. The nominee, Matthew Bryza, is a professional diplomat and an expert on this complex region. He is also an individual whose reputation amongst Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Europeans is beyond reproach. Perhaps, the silver lining

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and a badge of honor for Bryza is that none of these rather embarrassing cables so far has been signed by him.

It is, indeed, an odd world in which we live when U.S. domestic political considerations allow American officials to welcome and honor a separatist leader from Azerbaijan's occupied territories to the United States, while at the same time the U.S. State Department has been threatening a full range of sanctions against Armenia for selling weapons to Iran that were then used to kill U.S. troops in Iraq. Reality doesn't seem matter that much here because the said separatist leader was welcomed as "president" in spite of traveling in his personal capacity on his Republic of Armenia passport and neither that U.S. nor any other country, including Armenia itself, even recognize the separatist entity.

In order to help Armenia and Azerbaijan move forward and for future OSCE summits to be truly positive and pro-Armenian, as well as pro-Azerbaijani and pro-long-term peace and prosperity in the region, the U.S. should think strategically, get its act together and push Armenia to do the same.

With a responsible and integrated Armenia, free of its isolationist policies that have landed the nation into the warm arms of its usury benefactors, Iran and Russia, Armenia will share in the wealth, progressiveness and prosperity of the region. If Armenia wants to throw off the shackles of its Third World existence, it needs only to open its eyes and ally itself with the U.S., the West and make peace.

As for the U.S.'s esteemed Department of State, it is clearly time to get professional and get some new blood.

Jason Katz is the principal of the TSGroup, a consultancy that advises foreign governments, corporations and NGO's, including the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan. He is also the former head of Public Affairs for the American Jewish Committee.